

Thursday, July 22, 2021

From Dr. Earnest J. Ujaama

Open Letter to The Intercept:

The Intercept, supported by First Look Media, is supposed to be “dedicated to holding the powerful accountable.” I want to again bring your attention to an article written about me that clearly illustrates an example of double standards. First, I am not powerful. Yet, you still have not retracted the article written by Trevor Aaronson, entitled “The Cooperators.” This article was strictly a hit piece disguised as investigative journalism. It does not follow the stated mission of The Intercept and runs in opposition to the ideals of Black Lives Matter: “[T]o stand against racially motivated violence against black people.”

Aaronson wrote that I was “living in idyllic Berkeley and collecting approximately \$2,000 per month.” That was a lie. When I met Aaronson, I was not receiving any money. While the government had paid for living expenses from about 2011 to part of 2015, it was a form of welfare, not payment for services, as implied by Aaronson. This kind of living assistance is not unusual. I was an accused terrorist, so my only alternatives were to be homeless or remain in prison.

Federal Judge John F. Keenan approved my release, and I was under his supervision. Not only was I under the supervision of the court from the day of my release in mid-December of 2010 until the day of my sentence in 2015, but I was also forced to wear an ankle bracelet for nearly a year. The court had very strict rules about any government contact with me. Aaronson deliberately misled readers about the nature of my relationship with the government. My agreement had always been to tell the truth whether it helps or hurts the government. I never worked for the government, however there were three other witnesses who clearly did which Aaronson never mentioned.

Aaronson made references to me as a “mule” and a “snitch” which are racialized personal attacks. A mule is an animal symbolic of how Black Americans were legally defined under antebellum law. As I’m sure you know the word “snitch” is an extremely loaded word that gets people killed in my community. The government’s use of the words, “informant” and “cooperating witness” all have context and are purposefully misleading. Historically, these words were used by the FBI to cause division and death within the civil rights movement, and in particular, J. Edgar Hoover’s war on the Black Panther Party.

Hoover and every president he served, authorized the FBI to destroy, discredit, and disunite any Black organization, through disinformation and violence, that could bring our communities together with the kind of self-sufficiency once displayed in Tulsa, Rosewood, and Harlem. The

words “informant” and “cooperating witness” are FBI terms that were deliberately misapplied to ignite negative emotions, divide the Black community, have members of the Black Panther Party killed and to extort those who were powerless. The FBI used this strategy in America’s war on drugs (a *war on the Black community*) and they applied their strategy in the war on terror (a *war on Muslims*). Aaronson ignores this history and applies the same strategy, while The Intercept supports his efforts.

Aaronson wrote that I left the country in 2006 and later pled guilty to additional charges. What he deliberately withheld was that one of those charges was *Unlawful Flight to Avoid Testimony*. A *cooperating* witness does not “flee” the country to avoid testimony. Aaronson also wrote that in 13 years, I testified in two trials. He refers to me as a “prolific” cooperator. What Aaronson did not write was that a report by the FBI stated I was unable to identify any of the photos shown to me. Nor did he write about me being shot at and having several foreign law enforcement agencies trying to kidnap me. He did not write that I requested political asylum from the Belizean government *or* that I complained of being targeted because of my race *or* that I feared for my life from the U.S. government. He did not write this truth because it would be very difficult for any reader to believe that I was a *prolific cooperator*; his article would not be credible. Aaronson followed the same playbook used by federal prosecutors, he deliberately withheld other facts and omitted context.

To reiterate, a *prolific cooperator* does not complain about their cooperation, accuse the government of killing Blacks, make statements about being targeted because of race, “flee” the country in order to “avoid testimony,” get shot at multiple times by either Interpol, U.S. Law Enforcement., or some other foreign police, or maybe all of them, then request asylum. If readers knew the whole story, it would be extremely difficult for them to believe that any person who testifies in only two trials over a period of 13 years is a prolific cooperator. Evan Kohlman, a white male, and real government cooperator who testified in this case and dozens of other trials over a period of much less time was “*prolific*.” But Aaronson remained totally mute about Kohlman, in his article on “*The Cooperators*.”

Context has everything to do with the word, *informant*. An informant is anyone who gives information. There were at least nine government witnesses who testified, and all were informants. However, to be fair, only four were working for the FBI. By working, I mean they were getting paid for a service which included actively gathering information about others, secretly recording them – *as was done to me* – to help in an investigation or prosecution. I was *NOT* one of those *AT ANY TIME* working for *any* government agency. At no time ever in my life have I ever received payments to assist in the prosecution of others.

The larger question is why did Trevor Aaronson avoid mentioning other informants, rather than singling me out? These others were far more important. Cooperators such as Angelica Morris, Ayat Hakima, and Evan Kohlman were all paid to assist the government in their prosecution.

Why did Aaronson not use the word *snitch* to refer to Ms. Mary Quinn, another “prolific cooperator” who secretly made a recording to turn over to prosecutors? This is the real definition of a *snitch*. However, Aaronson refused to name any of the white government cooperators. If this article was not a personal attack and was not racist, then why single out the only Black guy for retaliation? Why ignore context and important facts while displaying similar behavior as prosecutors and law enforcement?

There were at least 14 persons from Seattle who were present at the Bly “jihad” camp. All, except two, testified before a grand jury in the Southern District of New York. Only three testified at the trial. Out of that group, there were two white women and two black men. The two white women were paid by the FBI to be informants. One of them came to me for help with getting her husband a lawyer. She secretly recorded our conversation which was used to accuse me of a false crime. I learned what she had done by reading the same trial transcripts that Aaronson claimed to read. So, why did Aaronson leave this information out?

Why did the others who were more involved with the two men from London not testify? For example, Semi Osman was far more important as a witness than me. He was the first to be arrested and provide information. Why did Osman not testify at the trial of Abu Hamza? It is not my intention to complain, because I originally agreed to cooperate in order to protect everyone else from being harassed. However, I am questioning the credibility and true nature of Aaronson’s article. Any respected and credible “investigative” journalist would have asked more questions. Instead, Aaronson ignored the researcher’s creed to assure trustworthiness, particularly credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Too much information from too many people would have ruined the government’s case, just like this article. There was no cooperation, no conspiracy, no SDNY jurisdiction, and no material support to terrorists. There was absolutely no crime committed. The government’s case, like Aaronson’s article was completely fallacious. Prosecutors alleged plans to rob banks, poison water streams, and kill truckers. Not one witness ever testified about any of these plans. In fact, they all testified “there was no plan.” The government alleged Feroz Abbasi, an unnamed coconspirator had pledged himself to Al-Qaida and trained to become a suicide bomber to attack the United States. After the trial, it was discovered the government lied. The government’s own witness debunked that charge.

Two of the charges against me were directly related to Mr. Abbasi. He was held and released from U.S. custody at Guantanamo Bay and returned to England where a judge railed against his detention, and set him free. Later, Abassi was provided nearly \$1.7 million as compensation for his illegal detainment. It was Abassi who provided my name while being interrogated and tortured. Why did Aaronson, an “investigative” journalist not include this important information in his article? If The Intercept’s mission is truly rooted in “holding the powerful accountable

through fearless, adversarial journalism” it does not show in this article. Instead of targeting the powerful, this article targets the powerless. Shame on The Intercept!

When I met Aaronson, his attitude was arrogant, demeaning and a painful reminder of my many personal experiences with racism. My refusal to be interviewed by Aaronson had nothing to do with control and everything to do with my freedom of choice. When any person says, “no,” they should be respected and left alone. There was no urgency or need to write about me. However, as we have seen many times over, white men with privilege have a hard time accepting or being told, “no.” Aaronson was upset he could not exploit me in the way he perceived. I was everything he thought about African Americans. His lie about me following him to the Bart Station, attempt to deny my right to be free from extortion, his use of racialized pejoratives and other name calling tactics – these were all calculated into his perceptions about race; the entire story wreaks of racism while The Intercept claims Black Lives Matter.

When examined under the framework of Derrick Bell’s critical race theory or from a social construction framework, the racial undertones are un-mistakenly clear. African Americans are tired of being bullied by those from the white public who have no willingness to recognize their violence through their arrogance, words, and actions. The cumulative effect of systemic racism which Aaronson benefits from and has allowed him this unwarranted attack on me with support from a major white organization, The Intercept, is among the reasons that Black Lives Matter protests ignited all around America and most of Europe. Our lives matter, and so do our voices. Let’s be clear, The Intercept is another white organization with white viewpoints and agendas.

Anytime someone Black makes a choice that a white person doesn’t like, there is always a fierce retaliation. Like Harvey Weinstein and Jeffrey Epstein who bullied and extorted their victims by threatening retaliation if they couldn’t get their way, Aaronson is no different. When I refused to meet him, it should have been the end. Instead, Aaronson decided to threaten and retaliate. He cleverly wove a story about me into a larger article that was contextually false. White law enforcement officers display the same kind of behavior when they confront African Americans who demonstrate the slightest bit of autonomy. These officials act with self-serving and self-righteous arrogance, believing it has nothing to do with their racism. On the contrary, it has everything to do with their racism. It also has everything to do with false perceptions of privilege and power, which devalues the lives of others they consider racially inferior.

When Aaronson writes “a would-be-entrepreneur with an explosive temper and penchant for running scams” it was nothing short of another attack on Black enterprise and determination. Any Black male who is confident and shows ambition is mocked and portrayed as violent by the white media. If not, they are otherwise portrayed as exceptional pets; a token or an anomaly created with the help of white altruism. What most people like Aaronson do not understand they attempt to redefine, reconstruct, or destroy. This is exactly what Aaronson’s article was all about.

It was amateurish investigative journalism. How would the highly respected investigative journalist, John Pilger, respond?

The Black Lives Matter movement is a response to more than 250 years of not being understood, but redesigned, and destroyed by the White public; it is a response to being disrespected and violated. Whereas once defined using racial science and racialized data without context, white media now uses innuendo to create Black narratives. We have suffered gentrification, and I rightfully argue, genocide. Our stories are told without our permission. Our families and communities are destroyed while decisions are made without our input. We are prosecuted and criminalized for being victims of centuries of the worst kind of abuse. Our children are confused and filled with self-hate. What I am asking of you is to rethink your privilege and power. What I am asking of you is to refuse to be part of any effort to destroy any Black life. I am asking you to consider my life as a Black male within this context and retract Aaronson's article or run a correct article that is based on contextual accuracy, not revenge. I am asking you to follow your mission to hold the "powerful" accountable, not the powerless.

Aaronson could have written about how Southern District of New York (SDNY) federal prosecutors got away with abusing their positions and wasting tax dollars prosecuting a fallacious case. All of the charges against me under Title 18 USC § 2339A were related to Mr. Abbasi and supporting the Taliban. The Taliban was a government. If there was any argument about the status of the Taliban, then the only option was to recognize a failed state. In any case, in order to meet the legal definition of 2339A "Material Support to Terrorists," there must be (1) *mens rea* and, (2) an act that is "calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation, coercion, or to retaliate against *government* action" as defined by law. In other words, the litmus test is a government entity. The logical question then becomes what "intimidation, coercion, or retaliation" took place, against what government and by whom?

The U.S. has always maintained that it does not negotiate with terrorists, yet it has always held negotiations with the Taliban and set free many of their highest-ranking members. There was a civil war in Afghanistan similar to the war in America between Union and Confederate armies. In that war who were the terrorists, the Union or Confederate soldiers? It is a simple logic.

You have the power to end this undeserving attack on me and expose the real story which is innocent men have been killed and imprisoned; their lives were destroyed due to their race and religion. I'm a living eyewitness to that abuse of power. I have never backed away from my religion, auctioned my soul or ceased my opposition to racial injustice. I am asking you to hold Aaronson accountable by issuing an apology and retract his article or publish a follow up.

Sincerely,

Dr. Earnest J. Ujaama